

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. Scope of The Presentation

A treaty, demonstrating the confidence and the imagination of two countries jointly attempting to develop and manage an immense river which reaches into the territories of both, deserves the widest public understanding. The Columbia River Treaty is such a demonstration of common confidence, but it is more than that. It is the result of a linking of national needs on both sides of the border where Canadian interests, primary for Canadians, were fitted into a wider pattern of continental cooperation. It is also a complex exercise in the engineering and economics of power development and flood control in an area affecting over 250,000 square miles of river drainage and major economic activities on two sides of the international boundary. It is, again, an advanced model of bi-national cooperation where the essential independence of both states is maintained within a framework of administrative coordination. The grand aim of the treaty programme is to harness the waters of the mighty Columbia River so as to tame its powers for energy and prevent its energies from spilling to waste or wreaking destruction.

The object of this presentation is to describe and analyse the Treaty, its purposes and expected achievements and to inform Canadians that the Treaty was a successful conclusion to long and complex negotiations. It will seek to indicate that the Treaty meets all the foreseeable technical and legal problems of protecting the national interest in a vital bi-national river; that there were no acceptable alternative or better uses of the Columbia River for Canada; that the various Treaty projects were wisely selected; that the price paid to Canada for its power and flood control benefits was a fair one, making possible the construction of the Treaty projects and their immense benefits to Canada; and finally that the Treaty not only maintains Canadian independence but that the essential integrity of the Boundary Waters Treaty, 1909 has not been affected.

2. The River and its Basin

The Columbia River is one of the great rivers of the continent, with length and average volume of runoff exceeded only by the Mississippi, Mackenzie, and St. Lawrence Rivers. The portion of the basin considered in detail in this paper consists of the main stem of the river and its major international tributaries, the Kootenay and Clark Fork-Pend d'Oreille Rivers.